DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 729 JC 820 219

AUTHOR Gollattscheck, James F.
TITLE Removing the Mystique from Needs Assessment.
PUB DATE 12 May 82
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the National Conference "Needs Assessment--The Pulse of the Community" (Blacksburg, VA, May 12, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Administration; *College Planning; Community Colleges; Community Study; Decision Making; Information Needs; Management Information Systems; *Needs Assessment; Program Evaluation; Student Needs; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS Educational Marketing

ABSTRACT

Needs assessment is not in and of itself a complicated, difficult, or expensive process but is simply one facet of good institutional management closely related to other management processes. Needs assessment is an integral part of: (1) institutional decision making and management information systems; (2) institutional planning, which should be based on information about current and potential students and their educational objectives, the conditions affecting the student's relationship with the college, and the college's image; (3) college marketing, which includes identifying publics and markets, researching and segmenting the market, and choosing target markets; and (4) institutional and program evaluation to determine how well the needs of the community and students are being met. While all institutions operate on the basis of some kind of estimate of constituency needs, the quality of these estimates will depend upon how thorough, accurate, up-to-date, and usable the information provided by the needs assessment is. Put in this perspective, needs assessment is concerned with nothing more complex than asking people basic questions about their educational needs. (HB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED216729

REMOVING THE MYSTIQUE FROM NEEDS ASSESSMENT

BY

DR. JAMES F. GOLLATTSCHECK
PRESIDENT
VALENCIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ORLANDO, FLORIDA

A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE
"NEEDS ASSESSMENT -- THE PULSE OF THE COMMUNITY"
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

MAY 12, 1982

JC 820 219

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James F.
Gollattscheck

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

REMOVING THE MYSTIQUE FROM NEEDS ASSESSMENT

I regret that I could not be here for your entire conference. I have a feeling that the presentations you have already seen and heard would have altered this presentation. My concept of your needs would have been updated. I have studied the program of the conference so I know that you have been involved in rather thorough discussions of most aspects of needs assessment and have examined several models. What I would like to try to do here in this final presentation of the conference is to put things in perspective -- to attempt to remove any mystique that may exist from the process of needs assessment -- to tie it into the total operation of the institution if possible.

My first premise is that needs assessment is not, in and of itself a complicated, difficult, or even expensive process. It can be, but then so can almost any activity when taken to the extreme. Needs assessing is simply one of the facets of good institutional management.

Much has been written about institutional management and the various processes involved. I should like to spend some of my time with you this morning looking at needs assessment as it relates to such processes of management as gathering information for decision making, planning, marketing, and evaluation.

First, let's look at gathering information for decision-making -- MIS, an abbreviation for a mysterious process understood only by the initiated -- those people who talk to computers and develop highly-technical models. Not necessarily! Perhaps it is the naming of something that makes it appear more difficult than it should be. Something called a system is always a little bit intimidating. It shouldn't be. Everyone and every institution has a system of

management information -- a process of getting and using information needed to make decisions. You and I came out this morning dressed for warm or cool weather. We brought our umbrellas or we didn't, based on what information we had about the weather today. As managers of institutions we make a wide range of decisions daily based on the information we have about any given aspect of the institution. That is, we use our management information system. It is probably incorrect for any institution to say that it is going to begin a management information system since the institution already has one. What the institution can and should say is that it is going to improve its system of getting information for decision-making.

We really have no choice about having or not having an MIS. The question is, how good is it? I can remember that it didn't rain yesterday -- out-of-date information -- or I can look out my window this morning and see that it isn't raining and that the sky is clear -- limited information. I decide that I do not need to bring an umbrella. If, however, my window faces west and the whole eastern sky is black and threatening, my management information system is weak and I am not likely to make a good decision about the umbrella. Reading or listening to a local weather report that forecasts the weather for this morning, all day, and for the w ek would give me better data from which to make a decision. Assessing the weather may be relatively unimportant for you and me as we decide whether or not to bring umbrellas this morning, but it is of serious import to the airline pilot or deep-sea fisherman as they plan a flight or a voyage and they had best not rely on assumptions.

One vital type of information used by institutions as they make decisions is that derived from assessing the needs of their constitutents. How capable the institution is in assessing needs of constitutents will, to an extent, determine the quality of its management information. The institution that plays hunches about constituent needs does not have as

good information as the institution that has made an effort to assess needs. An institution with a needs assessment made last year in a changing community does not have as good a base for decision making as the institution that has updated its assessment of client needs more recently. As in the weather decisions the results may be minor or critical. Offering a weekend seminar that fails because of a poor estimate of needs is no great problem. Developing a two-year allied health program involving purchasing expensive equipment and hiring full-time faculty is a critical undertaking and one's information about client and community needs had best be very good.

Assessing the needs of clients and potential clients is an essential part of a good management information system for educational institutions. Oscar T. Lenning, a senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems began a chapter on needs assessment in a recent book with the statement that "All instructional programs presumably exist to meet student needs . . ." He goes on to point out, however, than in many cases "it is as much the need of the provider . . . as of the students . . ."[1] Clearly when there is not ample knowledge about student needs available for decision-making, those decisions will still be made but will be based on other needs. The difference between community-based institutions and campus-based institutions may rest on whose needs influence management decisions.

Some of the most important management processes are those related to planning. Without good planning capabilities an institution can never move in an orderly fashion toward its goals and objectives but must rather drift from crisis to crisis. The process of planning like management information systems, however, has become unnecessarily intimidating. There are societies of planners; there are complex planning models; and computers have taken planning into the realm of science fiction. Again we have allowed a

simple, necessary process to become complex beyond ordinary understanding. Planning is nothing more than the process of identifying, studying, and deciding upon alternative courses of action which will allow the institution to achieve goals and objectives related to its mission. Planning, therefore, is the process of making future-oriented decisions. Further, all institutions plan. Developing a budget is planning; scheduling classes is planning; working out next year's college calendar is planning. The question then is not whether or not one plans but rather how good is one's planning -- how comprehensive, how sound?

If planning is a process of making decisions, then the quality of those decisions made is determined by a great extent by how much is known about all of the elements in the situation. In an academic enterprise one of those elements is the student -- both current and potential. The Districtwide Needs Assessment Report of the San Diego Community College District begins with the statement that "Planning best starts with the identification of needs . . . a needs assessment provides the planner with information necessary for making decisions in regard to planning . . . programs, facilities, and services which best meet the needs of the community."(2)

What does the academic institution need to know about its current and potential students? In short, everything that will affect the relationship between the student and the institution. The institution will want to find out at least the following:

- As much as possible about our current students?

- Who are our potential students?

- What are both groups seeking from educational institutions?

- What can we as an educational institution do for them?

- What conditions affect the student's relationship with the educational institution -- work, time, money, academic problems, disabilities, etc?

- How do the current and potential students view the college -- the age-old problem of image.

Another management activity is marketing. Like planning and gathering information, marketing is something every institution is engaged in. Some do it poorly; some well. Some follow very elementary, simple procedures (the college catalog is a marketing device) while other institutions undertake elaborate marketing projects and hire full-time staff.

That needs assessment is an integral part of marketing is obvious from a casual glance at the literature. In an article in the November 1979 Community and Junior College Journal entitled "Applying Good Sense to Marketing" Bill Keim, Director of Marketing for the Metropolitan Community Colleges of Kansas City, Missouri, and a good friend of many of us here made the statement that:

"For our purposes, community college marketing includes a full understanding of the

market, i.e., populations of people to be served, and an objective study of the product itself."(3)

Philip Kotler, a professor of marketing at Northwestern University, and Leslie A. Goldgehn, a University Fellow in Higher Education Administration at Northwestern, contributed a chapter entitled "Marketing: A Definition for Community Colleges" to Volume 36 of the Jossey-Bass series New Directions for Community Colleges entitled Marketing the Program. In that chapter they review a previous definition by Kotler of marketing as follows:

> "Marketing management is the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of programs designed to create, build, and maintain mutually beneficial exchanges and relationships with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives. It relies on a disciplined analysis of the needs, wants, perceptions, and preferences of target and intermediary markets as the basis for effective product or program design, pricing, communication, and distribution."(4)

Further in that chapter they enumerate eight steps in the marketing process. Of those eight steps, four relate to needs assessment: identifying publics and markets, researching the market, segmenting the market, and chosing the target markets.

They conclude their chapter with a list of benefits that a community college should gain from a marketing orientation. The first two of those benefits refer directly to an assessment of needs:

> "One, colleges will be much more sensitive and knowledgeable about community educational needs. Two, colleges will abandon the attempt to be all things to all people and will seek differentiated niches in the market. Each college serving a community will focus on providing those services and programs that are most needed and/or that are competitively viable."(5)

If we are to listen to these experts, we can assume then that roughly half of an effective

marketing program is assessment of the needs of clients and potential clients. How effective a college's marketing program is depends to a great extent on how well the needs of clients have been assessed and analyzed and anyone seriously considering a marketing campaign would do well to devote an appropriate amount of time to needs assessment.

Last but certainly not least, the final management process I should like to examine with regard to its relationship to needs assessment is evaluation. In a chapter in the seventh issue of New Directions for Continuing Education, entitled Assessing Educational Needs of Adults, Carolyn Barbulesco made the statement that:

> "Needs assessments should be conducted in two situations: as an early step in planning a new educational program, or as a part of program evaluation for an ongoing educational program . . . In the latter case, a needs assessment can help modify an existing program to increase its effectiveness, refocus its objectives, or change the content areas by finding out how well needs are being met by the program. Because educational needs are dynamic, it is important to assess them periodically."(6)

If the mission or one of the missions of the institution is to meet the needs of the community and/or of individual students, then the only way to measure the progress of the institution toward the fulfillment of that mission is to assess periodically how well the needs of students have been and are being met. Needs assessment then becomes a part of the planning → delivering → evaluating → planning loop, with needs assessment helping evaluate one activity and serving as a base for planning the next. As the San Diego report quoted above further states:

> "Needs assessment, if properly done, can (1) determine a process for identifying and documenting valid measurable objectives, (2) provide a realistic, empirical basis for the selection of programs and resources, and (3) provide measurable criteria for evaluation of educational programs, projects, and services."(7)

My first premise was that needs assessment is not, in and of itself a complicated process. I hope I have shown that some form of needs assessment is an integral part of such necessary management processes as gathering information for decision-making, planning, marketing, and evaluation.

My second premise in this attempt to remove any mystique from needs assessment is that you really have no choice. You and your institution are already involved in needs assessment. The only question is, how good?

If you are involved in supplying educational services to clients then you are operating from some assumption of need. Your assumption may be based on sound, accurate information or "seat of the pants" guesswork, but it is based on some estimate of need.

The quality of your needs assessment is not determined by its cost or its complexity. Some very simple, low-cost assessments have been as or more effective than elaborate projects. The quality of a needs assessment is determined by:

- How thorough it is. Are you reaching the clients you wish to reach? Are you getting the information your need? Are you asking all the questions you need to ask?

- How accurate it is. Is the information correct? Is your sample adequate? Are questions phrased correctly to get needed responses?

- How up-to-date it is. Ideally it should be continuous.

- How usable it is. Information reported in standard deviations or chi squares does not help most directors of continuing education.

My objective here has been to put educational needs assessment into perspective. Again the San Diego report put it very well:

> "Although sometimes complicated by technical terms and often developed from elaborate theory, a needs assessment is actually a fairly simple process. In its most complicated form it is nothing more than an educational "market analysis." In its simplest form it is a matter of asking people rather basic questions regarding their educational needs."(8)

That, I think, is what you have been talking about and learning at this conference, how best to ask people rather basic questions about their educational needs.

1. Lenning, Oscar T., "Needs as a Basis for Academic Program Planning," New Directions for Institutional Research, Richard B. Heydinger, ed., Volume VII, Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco; 1980, pg. 9

2. Districtwide Needs Assessment Report, San Diego Community College District, San Diego, California; September 1975, pg. 7

3. Keim, William A., "Applying Good Sense to Marketing," Community and Junior College Journal, November 1979, pg. 11

4. Kotler, P., Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, and Control, Prentiss-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey; 1980, pg. 22

5. Kotler, Philip and Goldghen, Leslie A., "Marketing: A Definition for Community Colleges," New Directions for Community Colleges, William A. and Marybelle C. Keim, eds., No. 36, Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco; 1981, pg. 12

6. Barbulesco, Carolyn W., "Components of a Major Needs Assessment Study," Floyd C. Pennington, ed., No.7, Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco; 1980, pg. 74

7. Districtwide Needs Assessment Report, San Diego Community College District, San Diego California; September 1975, pp. 7-8

8. Ibid, pg. 7

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES
96 POWELL LIBRARY BUILDING
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024
EE 36

JUN 25 1982